

Instructor Manuals That Reach Beyond the Basics

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Providing instructor manuals for part-time faculty is not a new practice. Post-secondary institutions often produce manuals filled with everything from the college calendar to the procedure for obtaining a parking pass. However, in the age of stretched budgets and waning support from their institutions, developmental education programs are looking for better ideas to boost their professional development for part-time faculty in low-cost ways. Improving the department's instructors' manuals can do just that.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

For our purposes, part-time faculty as defined in the NADE Self-Evaluation Guides are “teachers who occupy positions that require less than 50 percent of full-time service and whose appointment includes only limited or no fringe benefits” (Clark-Theyer, 1995, p.171). These professionals may be adjunct faculty hired to teach several classes a semester or full-time employees who teach one or two classes for another department. Most part-time faculty teach on a per-credit basis and have contracts that are renewable each semester, yearly or every two or three years. All of these professionals are subject to not having their contracts renewed if the student population decreases or budgets run low.

The literature concerning part-time faculty documents the lack of experience in their institutions. Benjamin (2003) reports that more than half of the part-time instructors have been in their present institutions less than four years and lack the institutional experience necessary to orient and assist students. Townsend (2003)

found that post-secondary education, which includes a vast number of part-time faculty, “has accommodated itself to a class of teachers who receive... minimal support for teaching, academic research, and professional development” (p. 23).

What are the results of this lack of support for teaching, academic research, and professional development? The research of the AAUP (2003), Benjamin (2002), Eney and Davidson (2006), Jacoby (2006), and Renninger et al. (2007) shows alarming evidence that student learning may be adversely affected. In its report “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession,” the American Association of University Professors (2003) said, “Contingent faculty, especially part-time faculty, ... are less likely to be informed about the latest developments in an academic discipline and to be challenged by recent research and writing” (para. 23).

In developmental education courses, the need for professional development may be even more critical than in the academic disciplines. The students who need to start their college careers with one or more developmental education courses often have been unable to thrive in classrooms with traditional instructional methods and materials (Smittle, 2003). Instructors need to learn a wide variety of teaching methods in order to reach these developmental students. Without professional development opportunities, how can part-time instructors learn these methods?

Gappa and Leslie (1993) were among the first to publish the recommendation to create a faculty manual and distribute it to all department chairs and faculty members, both full- and part-time. They suggested putting in this manual employment policies and giving it to part-time faculty at their faculty orientation. More recently, Nolan, Sieguist, and Richard (2007) suggest including two sections: one that details policies and procedures and another that offers information on the theory of teaching and learning and practical applications to the classroom. This idea is echoed in Lambert and Cox (2007), who developed a guidebook of “teaching suggestions, campus resources, and helpful hints for easing one’s arrival to the school”(p. 204). The authors surveyed

both adjunct faculty and department chairs before assembling this guidebook. The result was a document that even instructors who had been teaching for several semesters found extremely helpful.

The advantages of an instructors' manual can be tremendous. A manual can help instructors begin to understand developmental students and adult learners, give ideas for a stimulating class session, aid instructors in dealing with disruptive or absentee students, assist instructors in developing their teaching ability, and provide instructors with a concise listing of the institution's policies and procedures.

Instructor manuals can be organized in several ways. Some departments have produced a three-ring binder or a CD. Both of these allow instructors to pull ideas at will while a three-ring binder also allows instructors to add helpful and updated material to their individual copies of the manual. Online versions also exist, but Lambert and Cox (2007) found that often few of their instructors knew where to find their online manual.

There are two distinct types of instructor manuals: the general department manual and the program specific manual. Both can be invaluable resources for the instructor.

GENERAL DEPARTMENT MANUAL

Many colleges and universities provide faculty/adjunct handbooks that explain institutional policies and procedures as well as other useful information; however, a general manual targeted for a specific department or program can be a great asset to both full-time and adjunct faculty. This is especially true in developmental education where oftentimes part-time instructors have been hired because of their knowledge of content in reading, writing, and math, but they may lack teaching and learning strategies specific to helping developmental students succeed. A well-designed, detailed general department manual provides one type of professional development.

A departmental manual becomes essential for several reasons: to document the program, including mission goals, objectives and strategies; to make program components uniform; to allow a seam-

less transition for future semesters and future directors; to orient and inform new instructors; and to share with college-level math and English faculty to encourage consistent and measurable learning outcomes. The goal is to work closely together across departments to help developmental students successfully transition to college-level courses.

A general department manual is a work in progress and must be updated regularly to keep current with advising and placement, support services, contacts, courses, syllabi, programs, teaching/learning strategies, articles, and best practices in the field. For this reason, a three-ring binder with dividers to help organize is recommended. Another option would be an electronic version to keep material current. To enhance readability, it helps to use attractive graphics and typography in hard copy and electronic versions.

Because this kind of general department manual is substantial in size, labor-intensive and regularly updated, only one copy is usually provided for a department. The manual should be introduced to each new adjunct or full-time instructor and kept in a central location easily accessible to all. For example, the manual can reside in the department chair's office, the learning assistance center, or online. As new articles are added to the manual, copies can be provided to instructors for their own files. Each instructor should be required to provide a current syllabus to be included in the manual.

A general department manual can become not only a teaching tool and department guidebook but also a living document of the evolution of the department. It works especially well for small, intimate campuses, but it can also be adapted to larger institutions, especially in an electronic version which is accessible to a larger audience.

The manual might include an introduction with departmental rationale. A clearly defined mission statement, goals, objectives, and strategies – based on best practices – should be included and regularly consulted and followed. Charts can be developed to graphically illustrate the sequence of courses as well as placement

cut scores and course descriptions. New courses, programs, and support services (academic counseling, testing center, learning center) and other contacts relevant to the program should be included.

Additionally, it is recommended to include appendices, such as syllabi templates, course templates, educational effectiveness assessment plans, and learning outcomes. These appendices should be updated annually for evaluation and improvement of the department. Other sections might include “campus facts,” teaching tips, articles on developmental education and on teaching English Language Learners as well as the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Glossary of terms in the field.

Furthermore, the manual can provide faculty and instructors with bibliographies of useful references and best practices in the field. Schedules of current on-campus training opportunities may also be included along with other promotional materials related to developmental studies and learning support.

Clearly, a general department manual is an invaluable resource to the department and to its faculty and instructors – if it is kept current and consulted regularly! For this reason, an online version, which can be accessed 24-7, presents the greatest opportunity for currency of information provided there is someone who can maintain the website or Blackboard account. Such a manual can be central to orienting and training new instructors; it is also valuable as a tool for communication among colleagues who share ideas and a common pedagogy.

PROGRAM SPECIFIC MANUAL

In institutions where a college-wide part-time instructors’ guide exists or a centralized developmental education department is absent, a program-specific manual is advisable. Such a manual has the advantage of focusing strictly on the teaching of developmental reading, writing, or mathematics and the structure of the developmental program. This provides part-time instructors with information and materials to enhance instructional design and classroom interactions.

Program-specific manuals should cover two broad areas. The first area has to do with the framework within which the developmental discipline is taught. Two key topics come under this notion of framework: theory and context. First, the theoretical foundations behind the curriculum and pedagogy with implications for classroom instructional design are essential to an effective manual. This section on foundations should begin with the institutional mission and vision statements. Then, the section should include learning theory, adult learner development theory, motivational theory, pedagogical approaches for developmental students, and the mission of developmental education. The choice of theories for the manual depends in part on the developmental discipline. For example, a reading program may choose to focus on the cognitivist-constructivist approach to learning and reading and the implications for lesson planning. Unfortunately, practice typically neglects theory because the apparent urgency of preparing for actual classroom teaching looms large. This, however, is a shortsighted practice that is somewhat analogous to our students wanting to solve word problems in math before understanding the concepts upon which the problems were framed.

Second, the program-specific manual should frame the context within which specific developmental courses are offered. This discussion must include larger institutional, department and/or program policies, procedures, and curricula expectations. A developmental writing program manual, for example, should explain the college's assessment and placement policies and cut-scores used to place students in writing classes. Faculty members who do not have a long history at an institution frequently have little idea about the placement process and how students are enrolled into their classes. Having a description of the department's sequence of required composition classes helps a developmental writing instructor see where and how his/her class fits in the larger continuum. A clear statement of the developmental program's mission, its teaching philosophy, and its approach to academically underprepared adult learners should also be part of this framework section. Some pages

can be devoted to delineating course curriculum, expected learning outcomes, and academic assessment procedures. Including, say, a list of writing problems typical of developmental writers at this juncture would be extremely helpful for composition teachers new to developmental education to understand the expected learning outcomes for the program.

The second broad area of a program-specific manual consists of ideas for the practice of teaching within the program's developmental discipline. Ideas included can range from sample syllabi to creative approaches to building community within a classroom to examples of worksheets used to engage students in active learning. Experienced faculty members can be invited to contribute materials that they have used in different classroom settings to actively engage students who have a range of learning style preferences. A developmental reading program may choose to have sections that cover active reading, teaching a novel, summary writing, portfolio assessments, and library assignments. Developmental math manuals may want to include ideas on how to promote effective math study skills and overcome math anxiety, as well as how to balance long-term conceptual understanding with short-term mnemonic "tricks" for test-taking purposes. A developmental writing manual might have sections on teaching grammar to adult learners, instilling writing as a process as opposed to a one-time stream-of-consciousness event, and encouraging a critical level of thinking and expression.

MAKING THE MANUAL LEGAL

When producing any kind of an instructors' manual, it is essential that you secure permission to use any copyrighted materials. According to the United States Copyright Office (2006), Copyright protects 'original works of authorship' that are fixed in a tangible form of expression. Since any printed or electronic material fits this definition, it is against the law to reproduce any material of this kind without written permission. Once the permission is secured, it is important to keep a copy of the letter, email, etc., for proof.

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Once the manual is produced, it automatically is copyrighted. If you wish, you may secure an official copyright from the United States Copyright Office, but it is not necessary. Registration information can be obtained from <http://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ1.html#rp>.

CONCLUSION

It is important to be sure that your instructors know about the manual and understand how to use it. As faculty members are hired, consider including the manual in the new faculty orientation. In addition, encourage faculty, both full- and part-time, to contribute ideas and hold workshops where they can discuss how they have effectively used these teaching/learning tools in their classrooms. If your institution uses mentors for new faculty, have the experienced faculty focus on the manual's contents as they mentor.

Whether the manual is general or specific in nature, it should be a living, vibrant work that is updated regularly and meets the needs of the department or program. Though a manual will never fulfill the professional development needs of part-time faculty by itself, it will provide a solid foundation on which to build.

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